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ABSTRACT

In 1989, the Colorado Department of Education, in cooperation with the Centers for Disease Control, administered the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome/Human Immunodeficiency Virus (AIDS/HIV) Student Survey to randomly selected Colorado students (1,851), excluding the Denver Public Schools, grades 9-12. The sample was fairly equally divided by gender and grade level, with older students representing 95 percent of the sample, but it was overrepresentative of white/non-Hispanic students (83 percent). The survey revealed that Colorado students are interested in and informed about AIDS/HIV infection, although substantial proportions had not received instruction in it in school. Only 46 percent knew where to get tested for HIV infection. Students were generally willing to associate with AIDS/HIV infected students. Nearly all students were aware that a person can become infected from sharing needles used to inject drugs, that an infected person can infect someone else during sexual intercourse, that one can contract AIDS/HIV infection by having sexual intercourse without a condom. Ninety percent knew that a pregnant woman who has AIDS/HIV infection can infect her unborn baby with the virus; 91 percent knew that there is currently no cure for the infection. The majority of students knew that one cannot get AIDS/HIV infection from using public toilets or from being in class with infected individuals. Despite this level of information, student sexual behaviors remain a serious concern. Also, about half the students have some misconceptions about sources of AIDS/HIV infection (e.g., blood tests and mosquito bites). (AMH)

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1989 Student Survey Results

HIV-Related Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviors

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Summary

In 1989, the Colorado Department of Education, in cooperation with the Centers for Disease Control, administered the AIDS/HIV Student Survey to randomly selected Colorado students excluding the Denver Public Schools, grades 9 through 12.* A total of 1,851 students responded to the survey and returned a completed form to CDE for analysis. This is a preliminary summary of the results of that data analysis. Results represent only those students completing the survey.

The students were divided almost equally by gender, with 52% female (N=953) and 48% male (N=889) students responding. Likewise fairly equal numbers of students responded by grade level: 24% freshmen (439), 26% sophomores (474), 27% juniors (498), and 24% seniors (436). The sample was somewhat skewed by age. Thirteen to fourteen-year-olds comprised only 5 percent of the sample while older students ages 15-16 and 17-18 comprised 49% and 46%, respectively. Further, the sample is perhaps overrepresentative of white/non-Hispanic students (83%) and underrepresentative of Colorado minority students: 10% Hispanic, 4% black/non-Hispanic, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2% Native American/Alaskan. This may reflect the fact that the state's most ethnically diverse district—the Denver Public Schools—did not participate in the study and hence DPS students were not sampled.*

The survey revealed that Colorado students responding to the survey are interested and informed about AIDS/HIV infection, although substantial proportions have never received instruction at school or know where to go for testing. For example, while 95% of the students felt that students their age should be taught about AIDS/HIV infection in school, only 60% reported that they had, in fact, been taught about this subject. Although nearly 90% of the students felt they knew how to keep from getting HIV- the virus that causes AIDS, only half knew where to get good information about AIDS/HIV, and fewer than that (46%) knew where to get tested to see if they were infected with HIV. Students were generally willing to associate with AIDS/HIV infected students. Sixty-five percent said they would go to class with such a student and nearly the same proportion (60%) felt that infected students should be permitted to attend the respondent's school.

For the most part, students exhibited a high level of knowledge about AIDS/HIV infection. Nearly all students were aware that a person can get AIDS/HIV infection from sharing needles used to inject drugs (99%), that a person who has AIDS/HIV infection can infect someone else during sexual intercourse (99%), and that a person can get AIDS/HIV infection from having sexual intercourse without a condom (93%). Virtually all knew that a pregnant woman who has AIDS/HIV infection can infect her unborn baby with the virus (90%) and that there is currently no cure for AIDS/HIV infection (91%). Further, the majority of students knew that a person will not get AIDS/HIV infection from using public toilets (83%) or from being in the same class with a student who has AIDS/HIV infection (94%), and 90% knew that a person cannot reduce the

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chance of becoming infected with AIDS/HIV by taking birth control pills.

Despite this impressive level of information, student sexual behaviors remain a source of serious concern. More than half of the students (58%) report having had some kind of sexual intercourse with at least one person in their life and 23% reported having four or more sexual partners. The prevalence of student sexual activity is higher for male students versus females (64% versus 54%), and 17-18-year-olds versus 15-16-year-olds (72% compared to 49%). Although almost 90% of the sexually active students report using a condom at least some of the time during sexual intercourse, less than 20% have decreased the number of their sexual partners because of AIDS/HIV.

A distressing percentage of students have misconceptions about AIDS/HIV infection: 30% feel that a person may be able to get AIDS/HIV infection from having a blood test; 48% feel that a person may be able to get AIDS/HIV infection from donating blood; and 54% think a person may be able to get AIDS/HIV infection from being bitten by mosquitos or other insects.

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*The Denver Public Schools are doing a separate survey pursuant to an independently funded project on AIDS/HIV education.

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